

# Preface

The violin has been used in popular music since its beginnings, and today the instrument can be heard in almost every genre from country to jazz to rock. It is rare, however, to find these various currents brought together in music to be studied and performed by violinists of all backgrounds. For this reason, I am delighted that players will now have the opportunity to perform my *American Etudes*, originally published for cello, in these editions prepared by Daryl Silberman and Danny Seidenberg.

These pieces are not intended as a replacement for the traditional études; in fact, it is assumed that violinists working at this level will already be familiar with the established repertoire. On the contrary, this music is intended to reinforce classical technique, and to expand it, through the rediscovery of early practices.

One of these practices, common in Bach's time but nearly lost since then, is improvisation. Many of the études were borne out of improvisation, and by extracting and developing their various musical and technical ideas, violinists will be able to devise their own creations from the existing pieces. Since some of the études use standard popular forms, a study of their harmony and structure will prove helpful.

Another neglected tradition is chordal playing. Conventionally, chords have been used at the beginnings and endings of classical pieces, yet the violin can play chords consistently throughout a piece, even acting as a rhythm instrument. Syncopation, strumming, pizzicato, and harmonics are also areas open for exploration. These études, however, are not only vehicles for the study of technique: they are also suitable for recitals, either as a suite or as small sets or encores. Rooted in tradition, they speak of a new chapter in the life of the violin.

Throughout history, many composers have used music to reflect their time-period and country. In this century, musicians in the jazz, pop, and contemporary fields have taken instruments such as the saxophone, drums, bass, and guitar, and given them a new sound for modern times. While the violin has participated in many popular forms of music, its potential has not been fully explored. This book will inspire violinists to help their instrument assume a more central position in popular musical culture, thereby increasing public interest in its traditional repertoire and, most importantly, ensuring its continuation as a viable musical instrument that participates fully in changing musical currents.

One final note: though these études are meant to be taken seriously, do not take them *too* seriously. They are meant to be fun. Who says learning technique has to be dull? Enjoy!

AARON MINSKY  
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# Performance Notes

## 1. The Train Whistle

There is a tradition of music that is meant to sound like a train, and this étude is in that tradition. Though simple in sound, it is based around thirds, fourths, fifths, and arpeggios, with technical aspects such as string crossings and perpetual-motion bowing.

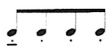
The following notational devices have been used:



This means play on the string with a slight release of pressure between the notes.



Here, this means play on the string, but somewhat off; technically, it is between spiccato and détaché.



In this context, the quavers/eighth-notes should be played off the string, with an emphasis on the first note. Play the staccato close to the string.

Triple-stopped chords should be arpeggiated, but played fast enough to sound solid.

## 2. Truckin' Through the South

Here, chordal scales and inversions are explored. The middle section features alternating string technique similar to that of the classical guitar and sequential arpeggios across all four strings. I have combined a southern blues feel with suspensions in the Baroque style. Don't overdo the accents, and keep the consecutive dotted notes very close to the string.

## 3. Broadway

This étude combines a funky bass line with Latin and African rhythmic influences. It makes extensive use of chords and double stops. Think of it as a polyphonic piece, played by a band that includes bass, electric guitar, piano, drums, and Latin percussion. Staccato dots in this étude indicate a true staccato. The descending scale in bar/measure 30 and elsewhere should be sustained but articulated. Where slurs lead to rests, lift the bow off the string but keep the left hand on, allowing the notes to ring.

## 4. Laid-back Devil

This is exactly what it is called—a 'laid-back devil'. Despite the technical demands (chords, double stops, and difficult arpeggios), it must sound relaxed and effortless. In order to achieve the right sound for the beginning, place the bow on the string with natural weight, parallel to the bridge. Draw the bow for just long enough to produce a clear, free, ringing tone. Note that although the only dynamic marking is *mf*, there should be beautiful phrasing throughout.

## 5. Sailing Down the River

Folk-orientated and floating from key to key, this étude emphasises the sixth. Good spiccato bowing is like wind to the sails.

## 6. The Flag Waver

This piece is a barnyard stomp with a touch of elegance. Chords are interspersed with melody, and a rhythmic influence from country music is reflected in the bowings.

## 7. An American in France

An American's impressions of various regions in France emerge here as a study in the whole-tone scale, a favourite device of French impressionist composers. There are some snappy, articulated rhythms and tremolo passages. Staccato notes within a slur should sound as separately bowed notes.

## 8. Like Crazy

This started out as a rock song. It includes wide-reaching arpeggios and its virtuosity is intended to give the violinist an opportunity to 'go crazy'. Bars/ measures 21–4 have been simplified, but for those willing to accept the challenge, here is the original version:

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the piece 'Like Crazy'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is highly technical, featuring wide intervals, triplets, and slurs. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3. There are several instances of '8va' (octave up) markings with dashed lines indicating the pitch shift. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, and the second staff contains measures 5 through 8. The music is characterized by rapid, sweeping arpeggiated patterns.

## 9. The Crack of Dawn

Primitive double stops, harmonic melodies, right-hand finger techniques, and a timely slap of the wood combine to portray that special moment when a new day begins.

## 10. October Waltz

The most lyrical of the set, this piece requires legato bowing and a light sustained sound. October is a month of autumn colour and falling leaves, tinged with a touch of melancholy. This waltz provides a nostalgic ending to this musical postcard from America.

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